RABBiT-CO NTRoL METHODS

Depending on the size of your rabbit problem, you can choose from the control methods outlined below.

The most effective control will result from a well-planned and well-timed operation using methods suitable for your property and its rabbit numbers.

Before taking action, consider all practical strategies and take expert advice to ensure that you choose the most effective method for your property.

Poisons

Poisons are a cost-effective way to reduce rabbit infestations. When applied correctly (use a fully-licenced operator), poisoning can lower rabbit numbers by more than 95%. Pindone and 1080 are the most commonly used poisons.

Successful poisoning requires good timing and good quality bait, which can be spread by hand, machine or aerial drop.

Always pre-feed rabbits with carrots before the poison bait is put out. This not only gets the rabbits to feed on the carrots but also helps to determine the amount of bait needed to achieve a 95% or better kill rate.

Care is required with all poisons (your contractor can advise on best practice). Indiscriminate or poorly planned use will not only fail to properly control rabbits, it may endanger people’s safety, pets, domestic stock and wildlife.

1080 is useful on larger blocks of land where rabbit numbers exceed level 5 on the MMS. 1080 can be distributed from ground, by a bait feeder, plough or by hand. It is applied to carrots or oats and requires two pre-feeds and one toxic application.

On larger areas or more difficult terrain, it can be spread aerially. 1080 is readily biodegradable. Once naturally broken down, it does not leave any toxic or chemical residues in the soil.

Pindone is an anticoagulant poison that is almost as effective as 1080 but is more expensive and there is an antidote for non-target animals. It can be applied to carrots or oats or used as cereal bait.

For the most effective results, Pindone on carrots requires one pre-feed and two toxic applications. Cereal Pindone pellets can be purchased for rural supply stores and laid in bait stations by people without a controlled-substance licence.

Cereal pellets are useful for rabbit control on lifestyle blocks and areas of intensive land use such as viticulture. However, results are variable and pellets are not as effective as carrot or oat baits.

The spreading of Pindone and 1080 on carrots requires the user to hold a controlled-substance licence, and more stringent requirements must be met before aerially applying.

Fumigants

In areas where burrow systems are evident and can be sealed off, fumigants can be used to poison the rabbits inside through inhalation of toxic fumes. It is useful for controlling young rabbits that do not wander far from burrows.

However, fumigation is a labour-intensive method that is best used in conjunction with night shooting or for small pockets of burrows as a follow up after other forms of poisoning.

Night shooting

Carried out by an experienced operator, night shooting is an efficient technique for killing rabbits in areas of light infestation, for example, after an RHD epidemic. Shooting is best used after poisoning and is not a method for controlling dense rabbit populations. Shooting during the day is also effective, especially if carried out in the early morning or evening.

In problem areas, once rabbit numbers have been lowered by poisoning, regular shooting can prevent rabbit-prone land from becoming a problem again. Several night shoots may be required annually to achieve control. However, as block coverage must be complete for shooting to be effective. This eliminates its use in some of the high, rugged land where rabbits can be a real problem.

Modifying rabbit habitat

Clearing land of scrub and rank grass where rabbits hide, or where it is difficult to apply control methods, is a form of habitat modification that makes it more effective for poisoning, shooting or fumigation to be carried out. It also reduces the rabbit’s refuge from predators such as hawks and ferrets.

Stocking rates

Stocking rates should be kept moderate in rabbit-prone areas, and rabbits should be controlled on developed areas.

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD)

While poisoning is considered the most effective and long-term control tool, RHD is considered to be a passive complement to other control methods. RHD is a highly lethal virus specific to rabbits.

Introduced in 1997, it had a significant impact on rabbit numbers. However, because the virus has become well established in the environment, the build-up of natural immunity has lessened its effect.

It is expected that RHD epidemics will still occur from time to time, but these won’t kill enough rabbits to avoid using other control methods.

Rabbit-proof fences and protective shields

The best way to protect your land, whether it’s a farm, orchard, vineyard, small block or garden, is to enclose the area with rabbit-proof fences. The mesh size should be no larger than 3cm, the height should be at least 1042mm, and the bottom of the fence should have a 15cm apron or be buried 20cm into the ground.

Cylinders of rabbit netting, plastic netting sheaths or sheet steel guards can be used to protect your young trees or shrubs. With care, your rabbit-proof fence and protective shields will last many years.
Rules for Rabbit Control in Otago

Assessing rabbit numbers on your property

Use the Modified McLean Scale of Rabbit Infestation (MMS), below. Signs of rabbits include scratchings and dippings in the ground and characteristic heaps of dung pellets.

### Modified McLean Scale (MMS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No sign found. No rabbits seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very infrequent sign present. Unlikely to see rabbits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pellet heaps spaced 10m or more apart on average. Odd rabbits seen; sign and some pellet heaps showing up.</td>
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### Non compliant levels of rabbit > 3 MMS

<table>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Pellet heaps spaced between 5m and 10m apart on average. Pockets of rabbits; sign and fresh burrows very noticeable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pellet heaps spaced 5m or less apart on average. Infestation spreading out from heavy pockets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sign very frequent with pellet heaps often less than 5m apart over the whole area. Rabbits may be seen over the whole area.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Sign very frequent with 2-3 pellet heaps often less than 5m apart over the whole area. Rabbits may be seen in large numbers over the whole area.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Sign very frequent, with 3 or more pellet heaps less than 5m apart over the whole area. Rabbits likely to be seen in large numbers over the whole area.</td>
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### Need help?

Experienced rabbit pest control operators can advise you on the most effective means of controlling rabbits on your property.

If you require any further advice or assistance with the assessment and control of rabbits on your property, contact us.

To help you prepare your property’s ORC rabbit-control programme, forms are available from ORC offices or download a copy from our website.

### Rabbit control in Otago

Rules and methods
### Rules and methods in Otago

#### Controlling rabbits in Otago

Rabbits have a long history as a major pest in Otago. When landowners or occupiers don’t complete effective rabbit control, the number of rabbits can grow and spread quickly through neighbouring properties, causing widespread damage to pasture, crops, vegetation and soils.

It is estimated that 10-12 rabbits eat as much as one sheep. Before the introduction of rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) in 1997, the loss to agriculture was estimated to be over $50 million per year.

**Who is responsible for rabbit control?**

Property owners and occupiers are responsible for rabbit control on their land. Control programmes for neighbouring properties should be compatible or completed jointly where there are no rabbit barriers such as rabbit fencing.

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#### Rules for rabbit control in Otago

The Otago Regional Council’s (ORC) 2009 Pest Management Plan (the 2009 pest plan) provides the rules for the control of rabbits and other specified pests in Otago.

This plan sets a uniform standard for permissible rabbit numbers for Otago at a maximum allowable level of 3 on the MMS. All landowners and occupiers must achieve this level or below. Maintaining rabbit numbers at MMS 3 will ensure that the population is held in check, limiting the opportunity for rabbit populations to reach destructive levels.

When rabbit numbers have exceeded Modified McLean Scale 3 (MMS 3), ORC will send a written request to landowners/occupiers to provide a rabbit-control programme. Guidance will be offered on the contents of the programme. The destructive potential of rabbits is such that failure to provide or implement a control programme may result in ORC employing a contractor to undertake rabbit-control work at cost to the landowner/occupier. In extreme circumstances, action may be taken through the courts to ensure a rabbit-control programme is implemented.

1. On all land in Otago, occupiers must ensure that rabbits are at or below MMS 3.
2. On land where rabbit numbers exceed MMS 3, occupiers must develop an ORC-approved rabbit-control programme to reduce numbers to MMS 3 or less. Occupiers are responsible for putting their own programme into action.
3. A written control programme for managing rabbits must:
   - be given to ORC for approval within two months of receiving a written request
   - aim to reduce combined rabbit infestations to MMS 3 or less
   - describe the control methods to be used and areas to be treated
   - include a timetable for the use of control methods.
4. ORC will approve a control programme if satisfied that the programme is reasonably capable of achieving its aim, taking into account:
   - the nature and characteristics of the land that exceeds MMS
   - the nature and use of surrounding land
   - the potential for rabbit dispersion
   - the risks to the environment and land production from rabbit infestation
   - the practicality of control methods on the land.
5. Control programmes for neighbouring properties must be compatible or completed jointly where there are no rabbit barriers (i.e. rabbit proof fencing)
6. An occupier must implement an approved control programme for their land.